DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 446 FL 017 381

AUTHOR Segal, Denise E.
TITLE The Use of Non-Ostensive Words in Varied Linguistic Contexts: A Study of Word Awareness in 6-12 Year Olds.
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Boston University Conference on Language Development (11th, Boston, MA, October 17-19, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Language; *Error Patterns; *Language Acquisition; *Language Usage; Verbs; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS Metalinguistics

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the development of children's metalinguistic understanding of the meanings of two non-ostensive words beyond the usual semantic acquisition period. The words, whose meanings cannot be associated with an object by pointing, were "pain" and "pretend". Two specific questions were addressed: What types of explanations do children of different ages offer to metalinguistic questions focusing on the words' meaning?; and How do children adjust the meaning(s) they assign to the word in accordance with the linguistic context in which the word occurs? Each word was studied in relation to numerous other words commonly co-occurring in the language. Metalinguistic questions were asked in a flexible interview situation. Results reveal the importance of accounting for alterations in word meaning in different linguistic contexts and offer a new direction for vocabulary assessment and intervention. Word meaning is by its nature difficult to formalize in an elegant theory, with meaning varying greatly with linguistic context. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED294446

The Use of Non-Ostensive Words in Varied Linguistic Contexts: A Study of Word Awareness in 6-12 Year Olds

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Segal
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Denise E. Segal.
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study,
Tufts University.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the Eleventh Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston University, October, 1986.

Current theories of word meaning account predominantly for the meanings of substantive (concrete) words, thereby excluding an adequate account of the learning of words which cannot be explained primarily by means of ostensive definition (that is, directly associating the word with the object). In relation to this, the majority of studies on word meaning have been carried out with preschoolers and development beyond the acquisition period has received relatively little attention. Furthermore, metalinguistic studies which deal with older children, have not focused upon the child's ability to reflect upon the meanings of words such as **pain.** `What is a word?' has been a more popular metalinguistic question.

Researchers (for example, Bowerman, 1978, 1981) have commented on children's "late errors" and have been concerned with errors that present themselves in 2-5 year olds, after a period of correct usage. However, metalinguistic-type tasks have not been used to delve more deeply into the child's knowledge of the word's meaning. In so doing, it is evident that even though children's surface productions may be correct, metalinguistic-type questions, at times, reveal that the child has a limited understanding of the word's meaning. When asked the question, `Can you feel your brother's pain?' one five year old (in the pilot study) answered: "If I put my hand on his knee (the injured area), then I can feel his pain running". Older children differ from younger children either in their knowledge itself or in how much they reveal of it. Commonalities between children of different ages suggest that they attempt to make sense of what may appear to them as bizarre questions in the same way as do their peers.

Katz (1972) has pointed out that a theory of word meaning cannot account for the changes that every single word undergoes in every single context. However, in understanding the development of word meaning in children, we are compelled to explain how they learn words despite this variation. The present study is concerned with the way in which the co-occurrence relations between words throw light on the meanings of words and with the development of the ability to take these variations into account.

This paper begins with brief clarification of a few important terms within a broad theoretical perspective. Investigation of the words **pain**

FL017381

and **pretend** is then discussed. Select developmental and theoretical findings conclude this paper.

Terms

Ostensive definition is the process whereby a word becomes associated with an object by means of pointing. In this paper, the term `non-ostensive' is used for words, the learning of which cannot be explained primarily by means of drawing the child's attention to one of the denotata.

The role of ostensive definition in the learning of words such as **pain** and **pretend** cannot be ruled out but we should not be tempted into regarding it as primary. A person clutching his stomach can be pointed to and this is a part of our notion of pain; and the frown expressed by a person thinking lends itself, similarly, to ostensive definition. However, these aspects form only a part of the meaning of these words. It is argued that the meaning of a word is its use in a diversity of linguistic contexts.

The present argument is that a word alters its meaning according to the linguistic context in which it occurs and that it is affected, reciprocally, by the meanings of the other words with which it occurs. It must be noted that a word can co-occur with certain other words in the language only. This approach is drawn from Wittgenstein's (The Philosophical Investigations, 1953). However, it must be emphasized that no attempt is being made to validate or refute Wittgenstein's philosophical position. Rather, these ideas are applied within a psycholinguistic framework and differently from his original conception.

A quote taken from G. Matthews' book (1980) in which he asks children philosophical questions, serves to illustrate the diversity of word meaning beyond the traditional use of the term `sense':

> Ursula (3,4 years): "I have a pain in my tummy"
> Mother: "You lie down and the pain will go away"
> Ursula: "Where will it go?" (S. Isaacs, 1930, p.359).

The words **go away** with which **pain** occurs adopt a particular use in this linguistic context. In contrast, **go away** assumes other uses in other contexts, as Matthews elaborates (ibid, pp.17-18):

> Grandma and Ursula's dog go away by going to another place. Grandma goes home, the dog goes outdoors. Each may come back by returning from the place to which they have gone...
> However, does a puddle of water go away by going to another place? Not really...
>
> A spot on Ursula's dress, ... may go away when the dress is washed...Perhaps it will disappear altogether

and...the squeak in Ursula's tricycle, it may go away when the wheel is oiled. It certainly doesn't go to another place, yet it may come back.

The aim of this study is to investigate the development of children's metalinguistic understanding of the meanings of non-ostensive words beyond the acquisition period. Two specific questions are posed, namely:

1) What types of explanations do children of different ages offer to metalinguistic-type questions focusing on the meanings of non-ostensive words?
2) How do children adjust the meaning(s) they assign to the word in accordance with the linguistic context in which the word occurs? Findings for the first question will enlighten us in this regard.

Method

Design: 1) This was cross-sectional

2) It involved a case study of words in that each word was investigated in relation to numerous other words with which it may co-occur in the language, for example: **same-pain; pretend-pain; feel-pain; pretend-pain; pretend-walk; pretend think.**

It must be noted that we were not investigating social factors (such as the way in which our language input contributes to the child's grasp of the meanings of words such as **pain.**

3) Metalinguistic-type questions were posed, for example, 'What is a pain?'

4) A flexible semi-structured interview provided the experimental setting.

Subjects comprised 64 children ranging in age from 6-12 years. They were all attending one private fee-paying school. There were 16 children in each of the age groups 6-7 years, 8-9 years, 10-11 years, and 12-13 years, with an equal number of males and females in each group. Ten adults were included as subjects to provide guidelines as to the relative 'end-state' of the developmental process. The adults were first-year University students. All subjects were drawn from a middle class population.

Tasks and Procedure: Each child was tested individually in four 15-20 minute sessions. Tasks consisted of standard questions followed by standard probe questions, and individual probes were then formulated on the basis of each child's individual responses. The entire session was tape recorded.

The tasks comprised metalinguistic-type questions and picture-story sequences designed to assess each word in a diversity of linguistic

contexts. In this paper, we discuss only **pretend** and **pain** though other words such as **word, same, similar, different, pain, ache, sore, anger, cross, pretend, think, know, believe, think, thought, dream, daydream** were investigated from the same perspective.

(INSERT DIAGRAM 1)

The tasks consisted of

1) Spontaneous formulation of sentences, for example, `Make up a sentence with the word **pain**.
2) Definition tasks, for example, `What is a **pain**?'
3) Fuzzy boundary tasks, for example, `Are a pain and an ache the same, or similar or different?'
4) Tasks assessing the word in a diversity of linguistic contexts, for example, **pain** as it co-occurs with the words **same, feel, where**. This set of tasks is the focus of the present discussion.
(see Segal, 1986, for elaboration of the tasks and for pictorial displays).

Why the words **pretend** and **pain**?

A noun and a verb were selected for investigation.

Pretend: This word has received attention from philosophers (for example, Austin, 1979; Wittgenstein, 1953) and psycholinguists (for example, Olson and Astington, 1984; Scoville and Gordon, 1980; Wellman and Estes, 1984) but it has not been investigated from the present perspective nor has it been the object of a metalinguistic focus.

Austin (1979, p.267) points out that it is misleading to handle **pretend** as if it is identical with the behavior itself except that some special feature is omitted from the situation, for example, that pretending to be in pain is the same as being in pain except that you do not feel pain. As an example, if we pretend to be in pain, there may or may not be a cause leading up to the display of pretend play behavior.

To take another example, if we pretend to laugh, there may be nothing humerous to laugh at; or we may not regard a joke as funny but laugh to be polite. Furthermore, the laughter may or may not sound different from a natural laugh even though voluntarily rather than spontaneously produced.

The word **pain** has provided a source of endless debate in philosophical circles but it has not been investigated from a psycholinguistic perspective. It is close to the child's own experience so it lends itself to investigation. It is also confusing because we may be misled into thinking that we can point to the pain itself because it has a physical reality. We are compelled to look beyond ostensive definition for an explanation of the development of words such as **pain** and **pretend**.

Part of the meaning of **pain** which the child has to learn is that it cannot be applied to inanimate objects; that it cannot be transferred from one person to another; that it is used within a broad situational context involving cause, possible overt demonstration of pain behavior and consequences; that the experience of pain is private but that we are able to communicate effectively about it with others; that we can point to the place of the pain but not to the pain itself; we cannot even be certain that the sensation experienced is the same from one occasion of use of the word to the next; and that emotional pain differs from physical pain. Furthermore, we have to feel pain in order to have pain ourselves but we cannot draw on our own experience when detecting pain in others. **Pain** and **ache** may both be applied to discomfort in any area of the body but **ache** is more commonly applied to certain areas such as tooth, head and stomach.

It will be noted that the tasks for **pain** are very different from those for **pretend**: the nature of each word determines the types of tasks that are formulated to assess children's knowledge of that word. With **pretend**, we used the same metalinguistic task across a variety of contexts. With **pain**, on the other hand, we used several different tasks. When we attempted to hold the tasks constant, we frequently arrived at meaningless utterances. This difference in assessing these two words may relate to:
1) the one being a verb and the other being a noun
2) the position that the word holds in the sentence relative to that of the word with which it co-occurs.

Responses were coded according to strategies employed by the child in answering the questions and according to his/her understanding of the word within a variety of linguistic contexts. Findings are presented as figures displaying percentage scores together with verbatim transcripts and descriptive explanation. For clarity of graphical representation, different scales are used on the graphs. Percentage scores afforded meaningful comparisons between the children (n=16) and the adults (n=10). Where percentage scores for the various criteria were so small as not to allow trends to be meaningfully interpreted, tables were preferred to figures.

Test-retest Reliability: Out of a total of 192 responses from a randomly selested set of tasks, there was 94% consistency and only 6% unaccounted for variance. Certain tasks were presented twice rephrased so as to check for consistency. Certain tasks were also scored twice, under the category (eg. definitions) and under the word (eg. **pretend**) to check for consistency. I was unaware of which children were of which age when rating.

RESULTS (see Segal, 1986, for detailed figures and tables)

Pain was investigated in a variety of linguistic contexts, that is, in

relation to a variety of words. There were two aspects of interest here:

a) Different facets of the word's meaning were elucidated in different contexts.

b) Emphasis on the concrete versus the less tangible aspects of the word's meaning (for example, the place of the pain versus the type of pain).

1) **Same pain:** When the word **same** occurs with the word **pain**, it takes on a particular use. a) **Same pain** necessarily implies that there are two pains. It cannot mean that there is one pain that is shared (which may be the case with **same apple**).

b) The pains cannot be compared overtly so we draw conclusions about the type, extent, and location of the other person's pain on the basis of his verbal description.

c) We cannot be sure that the pain that we experience on two different occasions is the same but, in everyday language, we talk about having the `same pain' over time.

It is clear that **same** highlights aspects of the meaning of **pain** and vice versa. Examples of a variety of tasks assessing children's understanding of these two words as they co-occur, are:

1) If I say that I have the same pain as you, what do I mean?

Children up to 12 years of age, place and type of pain were mentioned equally. Beyond 12 years, type was mentioned predominantly.

2) Can you have the same pain as me? When would that happen?

Responses corresponded to those for (1) above.

3) When you fall, do you always have the same pain or is it sometimes different? What makes it different?

Children up to 10 years of age emphasized the place of the pain as the deciding criterion. From 10 years of age, type, place and intensity were equally predominant in their explanations.

4) In this picture, a boy is hit by a man and in this picture, a boy has toothache. Is the pain of this boy the same as the pain of this boy or is it similar or different? Why?

There was uniformity in the responses of children at all age levels except for a reverse trend at 8 years of age. (I do not have the time

to go into any detail but I would like to mention that this trend was noted on numerous tasks involving different words).

The common answer was that the pains are different as they are of a different type, for example, "cos the pain is in the tooth and he's got pain in his face" (6 years). Additional probing separated out type from place of the pain.

5) In this picture, a boy has toothache and in this picture, a girl has toothache. Is the pain of the girl the same as the pain of the boy? Why?

Up to 12 years of age, children emphasized that the pains are "the same", both being toothache. From 12 years, subjects concluded that the pains "may be the same" and proposed possibilities.

FEEL PAIN

When asked the question, `Can you feel your brother's pain?', one 5 year old (in the pilot study) answered: "If I out my hand on his knee (the place of the pain), then I can feel the pain running".

`Does this sentence sound OK or not? I have a pain in my head but I can't feel it.'

The answer "unacceptable" predominated for all age groups, for example, "You saying I've got it but I can't feel it...I know I've got it but I don't know I've got it...Now that's really idiotic" (8 years)

In contrast, the word **feel** used together with the words **dream** and **anger** gave rise to very different results. As an example, in
`Can you feel your dreams?'

all the 6 year olds interpreted **feel** in the sense of `touch' and offered explanations such as "No, 'cos it,s a dream-it just comes out of your head". From 8 years, **feel** was interpreted by a minority of children as `experiencing an emotion'. From 10 years, children regarded **feel** in this context to mean something other than `touch', for example,

"You feel like you on a boat, you sitting on a boat and a shark's chasing you" (10 years)

"like, if it's a sad dream, like you could get like your heart could be all sore" (10 years)

"well, it it's a scary dream, you can feel scared" (12 years)

WHERE PAIN

`Where do you feel pain?'

When asked this question, children do not answer 'in the kitchen' which they may answer if asked 'Where did you first feel pain?' Rather, they give answers such as, "in my tummy", "in my side", and so on. The

younger children give an example as an explanation. From 10 years of age, "anywhere" (in the body) was the favored response.

'Where do you feel an ache?'

This gave rise to equivalent answers but specific parts of the body were emphasized, for example, head, tooth and back. "Anywhere" was the predominant response from 12 rather than 10 years of age.

'Where do you think?'

gave rise to "in my head" from the three youngest groups with "brain" or "mind" being suggested from 12 years of age.

'Where do you dream?'

The 6 and 8 year olds interpreted **where** as a place outside of the body and gave answers such as, "well, they could happen in a shopping center or in your bed"

From 10 years, **where** was regarded as referring to 'place in the body', for example, "in your head" (10 years) and "in your brain" (12 years).

These findings corroborate those of Piaget (1929) whose studies on naming in children may be reinterpreted from the perspective of the of the word's meaning.

The word **where** illustrates clearly the way in which the child has to adjust his understanding of a word in accordance with the other words with which it occurs in the language.

DO PAIN

'What do you do when you have a pain?'

The situational or broader consequences predominated, for example, go to the doctor" (versus the physiological responses such as "cry"). From 10 years, **do** was interpreted as: "I might not show it or I might show it".

In contrast, **do** in relation to **think** in Q161: What do you do when you think? gave rise to answers such as "You stand still" or "you sit down" at 6 years where the emphasis is on overt action. There was a progression to an emphasis on covert behavior, for example,
"well, you always think - so you could be doing anything"; or "there's no way of doing it...thoughts come to your mind".

'What do you do when you're angry?'
This gave rise to very different answers from **pretend-pain.**

Answers were, for example, "I scream and shout" (6 years); "I always slam the door behind me so that they know I'm cross, then I take it out on my cushion (pillow) or something" (12 years)

These tasks illustrate that when used with the word **do angry**, and **pain** do not require a shift from a focus on overt action to more mental operations as does **think**. For **angry**, **pain** and **pretend**, the progression occurs mainly in the types of explanation offered and in the strategies employed, namely, an example as an explanation, leading to general explanations and to a greater diversity of possibilities being emphasized by the older children.

PRETEND

Adults adjusted the meaning of **pretend** according to the linguistic context in which the word occurred. The sense of `deceiving another person' was most commonly emphasized as opposed to `taking on the characteristics of another person or animal' which implies deception of a different type. The use of **pretend** gave rise to different developmental findings when applied in different linguistic contexts.

The tasks for **pretend** are formulated as comprehension tasks but they require that the subject reflect upon the meaning of each word thereby including a metalinguistic component. Furthermore, the probe questions raise the task to the level of metalinguistic awareness.

PRETEND PAIN

`How do you pretend to be in pain?'
Subjects in all age groups mentioned `making a noise and clutching the painful area of the body'. In this task, unlike the other **pretend** tasks, 6 year olds mentioned more than one criterion. Adults gave general explanations such as: "By going through the action and making sounds as if to say you're in pain".

In contrast to real pain, with **pretend pain**, there may be no preceding event which leads to pain. However, you could pretend to be in pain as revenge if someone hits you, even though they did not hurt you.

Pretend to be in pain' is recognized by the overt and frequently exaggerated behavior associated with `being in pain', usually followed by laughter. Pretending to be in pain oneself draws on the same set of criteria that one focuses on when recognizing this behavior in another person. In contrast, being in pain oneself draws on a different set of criteria from recognizing pain behavior in another person. Ones own pain is marked by physical discomfort which cannot be experienced when acknowledging another person's pain. Recognizing pain behavior in another person is based only on overt manifestations such as clutching the injured area of the body, moaning, and so on. This is an important distinction with regard to the meaning of the word **pain** and the way in which it is learned by children. It would seem that children have to draw on different criteria in understanding and using the word **pain** in these two different contexts.

All subjects readily recognized pretense behavior in a picture series (to be in pain in the second picture. Pretending to be in pain involves actions which extend beyond the demonstration of pain behavior itself, for example, laughing.

From 6 years, the question 'How can you tell when someone else is pretending?' (Q), led to the explanation that laughter enables one to discern whether the person is pretending or not.

'How can you tell when someone else is in pain? How do you know they're not just pretending?'

6 year olds gave answers such as "afterwards they'd laugh" or " they'd tell you they were only pretending". From 8 years, children began to emphasize the difficulty one has in determining whether they are pretending or not and gave answers such as, "you can't tell". More detailed and elaborate answers occurred for 10 and 12 year olds.

PRETEND WALK

This task yielded no developmental progression. Subjects of all age groups found it equally difficult and confusing. They argued that one "cannot pretend to walk. You either walk or you don't walk". The commonest answer was to "walk on the spot". The adult's explanations differed from those of the children in complexity of formulation but not in content.

PRETEND SING

The commonest suggestion was that one move ones mouth without making any sound. From 8 years of age, children drew on a broader context which was more elaborate with increasing age. In contrast to the children, numerous adults offered general explanations.

It is interesting to note that laughter applies to all the **pretend** tasks

when one is attempting to deceive someone else. However, for tasks such as **pretend to walk** and **pretend to be yourself** subjects did not mention laughter as a criterion. They concentrated on whether pretense was possible in these situations. 'Walking' was the focus of attention rather than behaviors commonly associated with pretending.

PRETEND DREAM

6 year olds explained this as 'pretending to sleep', for example, "you just chaff that you sleeping"; " when you don't really close your eyes - you peep" . 8 year olds argued that you "can't pretend to dream". At 10 years, children attempted to find an action for explaining, for example, "chaff you sleepwalking"

It will be noted that the use of the word "can't" differed for certain tasks. When applied to **pretend to walk**, the argument was that you can't (pretend), "if you walk, you walk". When applied to **pretend to dream**, children did not argue, similarly, that "if you dream, you dream". Rather, they argued that you can't pretend to dream because dreaming is "going on inside your head and other people can't always tell when you're dreaming" (Adult).

PRETEND WRITE

Responses for this tasks were uniform for all age groups with regard to content. Common answers were that you move your hand up and down over a piece of paper or over no paper at all and that, if you use a pen, you make no marks on the paper at all.

When probed with: But writing means that you have to make marks on the paper, so are you pretending to write or are you pretending to do something else? children were adamant that they were pretending to write. In contrast, when probed similarly for pretend to walk, children became confused, altered their initial responses, backtracked, and so on. This has important implications for our understanding of the meaning of the word **pretend**.

PRETEND ANGRY

There was uniformity in the responses for this tasks. The majority of subjects provided answers such as, "you start shouting and screaming" (6 years) and (you get angry) "for no reason" (Adult).

PRETEND THINK

Predominant for all groups of subjects was the stereotyped, 'classic' posture depicting someone thinking, that is, sitting down, staring into space or closing ones eyes, head on hands, finger on chin. From 12 years, children gave general explanations such as, "(you) looking very concentrated, like when you concentrating" or "you couldn't pretend to have a mental process but you could put on facial expressions..." (Adult).

When probed further with: 'Will there be something going through your head at the same time or not?' 6 and 8 year olds answered "no" whereas the 10 and 12 year olds concluded that one could pretend to think and be thinking at the same time. One gifted 12 year old who combined the insight of the adults with the clear thinking of his age group, explained as follows:
"I'd probably stop thinking when I've been thinking how I could make myself look like I'm thinking".

PRETEND LAUGH

Here there was diversity both within and between groups of subjects. The major characteristics emphasized were altering or removing the [illegible] laughing for no apparent reason; forcing the laughter in contrast to

its natural spontaneity; adopting the stereotyped posture associated with laughter (It is of interest that the latter occurred for adults only whereas the stereotype for thinking was mentioned by children of all age groups).

For all the **pretend** tasks, the older subjects added a broader context. This differs from the general explanations provided for many of the **pain** tasks.

DISCUSSION

1) The meanings of **pain** and **pretend**: The findings reveal that
a) a word alters its meaning according to the linguistic context, and
b) that children learn different uses of the word (that is, in different linguistic contexts) at different periods of development).

Aspects of the meanings of the words were highlighted in each of the linguistic contexts in which they were investigated.

(INSERT DIAGRAM 2)

And reciprocally, the meaning of the word elucidated aspects of the meanings of the other words with which it occurred. Developmental trends (marked *), uniformity (marked +) and variation (unmarked) occurred depending upon the linguistic context in which the word was used. There was also a reverse trend, most commonly at 8 years of age, on a variety of different tasks for different words (see Segal, 1986).

(INSERT DIAGRAM 3)

From the diagram, each of the words with which **pain** occurs enlightens us as to its meaning. For example, it is something inside the body (**where**), that we experience rather than touch (**feel**); it gives rise to certain consequences (**do**), and so on. A comprehensive account of the word's meaning could be established when the findings from all the tasks were considered together.

Reciprocally, the meaning of the word elucidated aspects of the meanings of the other words with which it occurred, for example, for **pain** (diagram above), it reveals that **same** can be used in an equivalence sense and can be applied when we cannot point out exact similarities between two entities; and that **where** may refer to a place inside the body (even if not clearly demarcated) as opposed to only in the external environment. However, what may be termed the 'meaning-energy' seems to be drawn inwards towards **pain** to a greater extent than the reverse.

In contrast, for **pretend**, the 'meaning-energy' tends to move outwards towards the other words with which it co-occurs. The direction of energy appears to be related to the position of the word in the sentence

relative to the other word(s) with which it occurs. However, this requires further evaluation.

INSERT DIAGRAM 3

From the diagram, it can be seen that **pretend** does not involve simply omitting some special feature from the behavior itself (Austin, 1979). The child has to learn the different uses of the word in the different linguistic contexts.

2) Strategies and Explanations: It was found that children of different ages drew on different strategies in answering the questions and the strategies varied at any particular age depending upon the linguistic context in which the word occurred and depending upon the task.

a) The younger children drew on an example as an explanation whereas the older children and the adults drew on a general explanation, or if they drew on specific examples, it was within a broad situational context.

b) Younger children focused on one criterion in their explanations whereas older children focused on two or more criteria. Again, at times the younger children focused upon two criteria but it depended upon the task.

c) There was a tendency for the younger children to focus on a concrete aspect of the word's meaning or to use the word in a linguistic context which includes a concrete word. As an example, the younger children concentrated on the place versus the type of pain; and 'What do you do when you **think**' was explained as "stand still" by the younger children. It would seem that ostensive definition is descriptive of part of the learning process but in a different way from its usual application to substantive words.

d) Different aspects of the word's meaning were recognized earlier than others or that children in the early stages are only able to focus their attention on specific aspects of its meaning.

3) Metalinguistic questions offered a suitable means of delving into the child's understanding of word meaning beyond his spontaneous productions. The present study answered questions about word meaning with the aid of metalinguistic tasks as a medium for exploration. Despite children's spontaneously correct productions beyond the 6 year period, it was found that they display different levels of understanding of words when required to reflect upon their meanings. It was also found that for any one word, such as **pretend**, their level of understanding varied from context to context.

It is postulated that metalinguistic awareness may not be a stage that appears during middle childhood but may, rather, be thought of as an ongoing and integral part of the process of language development. It is suggested that our ability to reflect upon the meanings of words is an important part of our growing ability to use and understand these words in a diversity of contexts.

4) Our use of the term `vocabulary': Evidence from this study leads me to suggest that children do not acquire the meaning of a word in its totality but that their knowledge of the word's meaning increases or extends through development.

Vocabulary tests which have been commonly applied in the fields of psychology and speech-language pathology, take little account of developmental differences in children's understanding of words with age. Vocabulary has generally been regarded as an all-or-none phenomenon, either being within the child's repertoire or not. The present findings accord with recent work on `vocabulary depth' (for example, Curtis, 1983). We need to re-evaluate what we mean when we regard the child as `having something within his repertoire'.

Within the field of language therapy, we are generally dictated to by the same underlying premises. We would teach the word in a single context and assume that the child could extend it spontaneously to a variety of other linguistic environments. Children without language difficulties display a remarkable ability to do this but work with language - impaired children questions our taking this ability for granted and it may have to be taught directly.

It is suggested that vocabulary tests take account of children's explanations of the word's meaning and grade the level of understanding that the child has of any particular word according to the strategies he employs and the facets of the word's meaning on which he focuses.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the importance of accounting for alterations in the meaning that the word undergoes in different linguistic contexts.

This study also has implications for psycholinguistic research in that it offers a novel approach to investigating non-ostensive words, thereby extending the findings of previous researchers. Furthermore, a new direction is offered for vocabulary assessment and intervention.

On the basis of the present findings, it would seem that word meaning is, by its very nature, difficult to formalize in an elegant theory. The rules of use seem to vary from word to word and, within any particular word, from linguistic context to linguistic context. At present, we propose only strategies for explaining how words are learned rather than attempting to formalize word meaning itself.

Finally, as Bowerman points out (1981, p.2), perhaps we need to rethink the question of what it means to "...acquire a piece of linguistic knowledge".

REFERENCES

AUSTIN,J.L. (1979) Philosophical Papers - 3rd Edition. (Edited by J.O.Urmson and G.J.Warnock). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BOWERMAN,M. (1978) Systematizing Semantic Knowledge: Changes Over Time in the Child's Organization of Word Meaning. Child Development, 49, 977-987.

BOWERMAN,M. (1981) Beyond Communication Adequacy: From Piecemeal Knowledge to an Integrated System in the Child's Acquisition of Language. Keynote Address, Thirteenth Annual Child Language Research Forum, Stanford University, California.

CURTIS,M.E., COLLINS,J.M., GITOMER,D.H. and GLASER,R. (1983) Word Knowledge Influences on Comprehension. Paper presented at the Meeting of the American Educational Association, Montreal, Canada.

KATZ,J.J. (1979) Semantic Theory. New York: Harper and Row.

OLSON,D.R. and ASTINGTON,J.W. (1984) Children's Acquisition of Metalinguistic and Metacognitive Verbs. Paper presented at the 92nd Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.

PIAGET,J. (1929) The Child's Conception of the World. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

SCOVILLE,R.P. and GORDON,A.M. (1980) Children's Understanding of Factive Presuppositions: An Experiment and a Review. Journal of Child Language, 7, 381-399.

SEGAL,D.E. (1986) The Development of the Meaning of Non-Ostensive Words in a Group of Primary School Children. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation submitted to Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

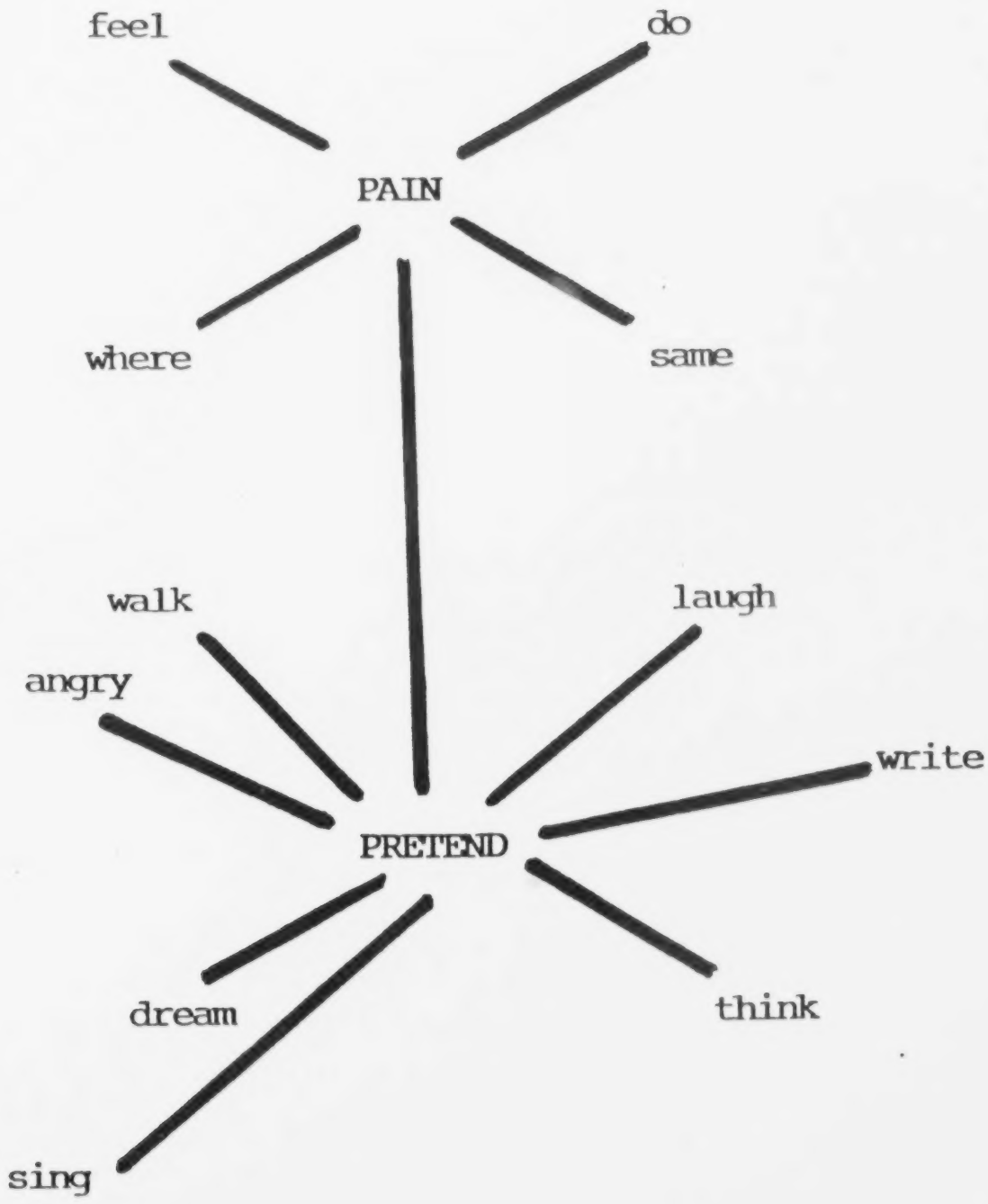
WELLMAN,H.M. and ESTES,D. (1984) Children's Early Use of Mental Verbs and What They Mean. Paper presemted at the 92nd Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.

WITTGENSTEIN,L. (1953) The Philosophical Investigations. (Translated by G.E.M.Anscombe). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

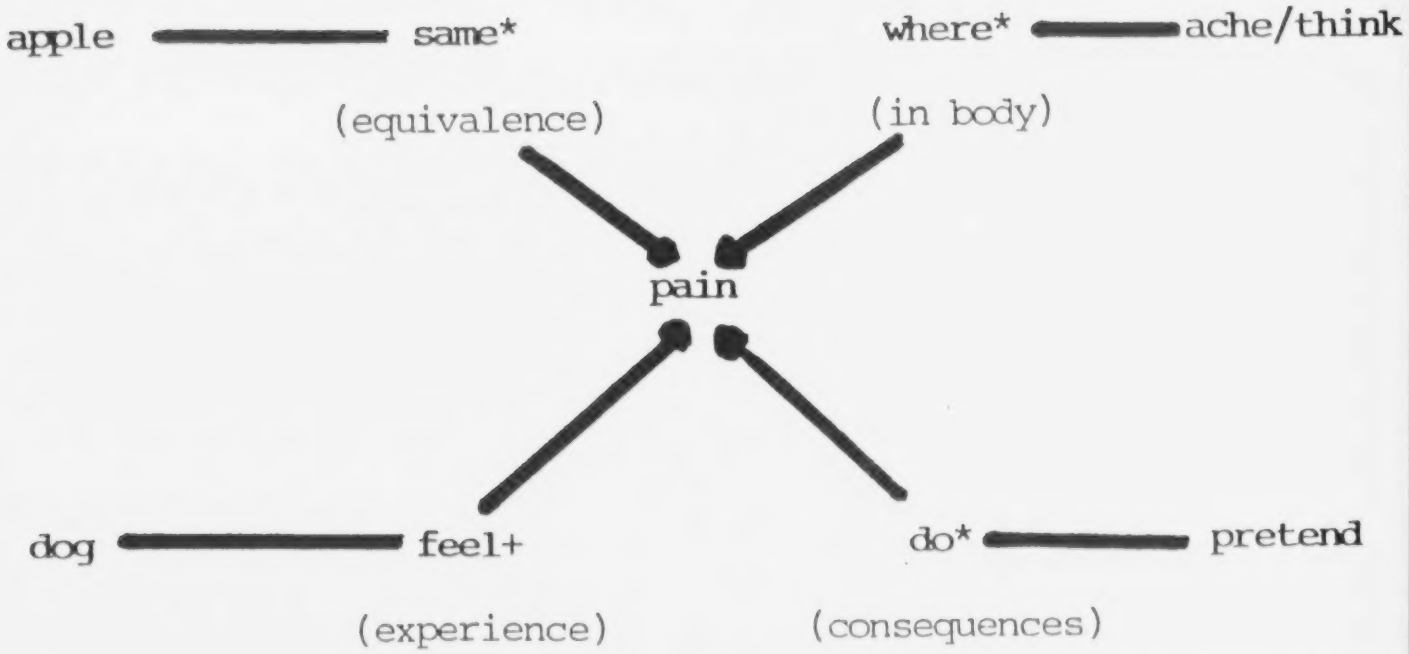
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on a section of a doctoral dissertation submitted to Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. I wish to thank Professor L. Lanham and Dr C. Macdonald for their guidance and support throughout this study and Professor M. Wolf, Tufts University, for valuable assistance in preparation of this paper. This study was supported by a bursary from the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa , which is gratefully acknowledged.

Words



(DIAGRAM 1)

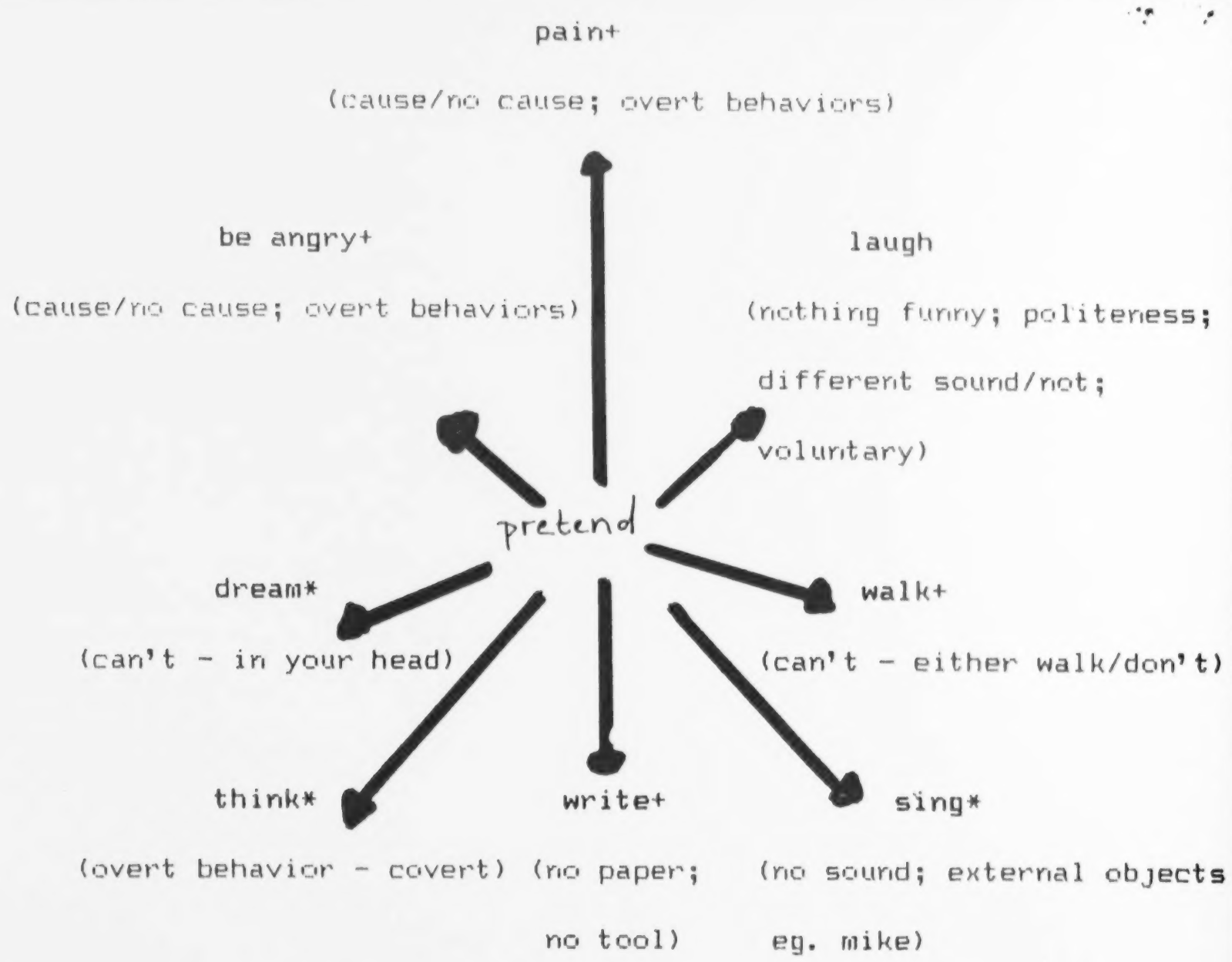


Key: * = developmental trends

+ = uniformity

= variation

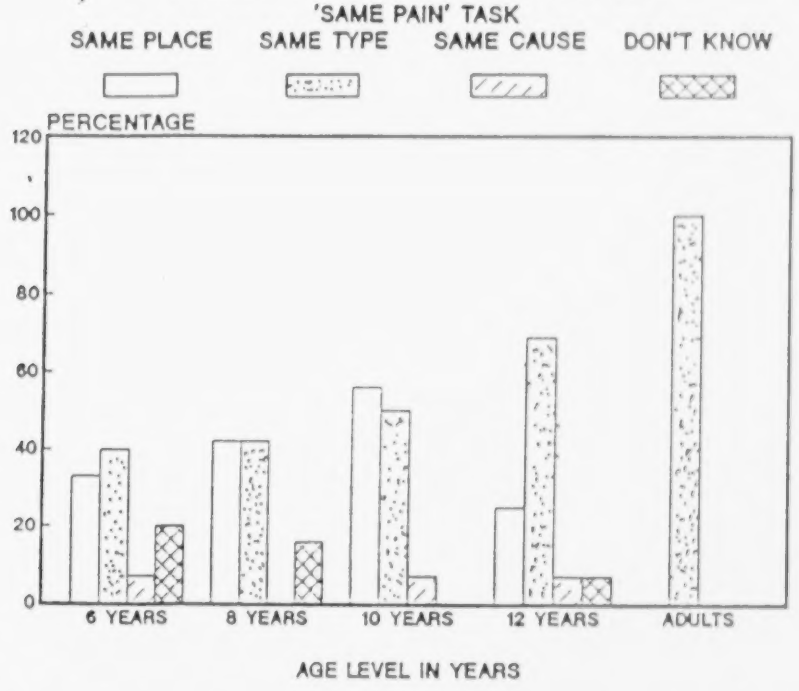
(DIAGRAM 2)


pain+
(cause/no cause; overt behaviors)
be angry+
(cause/no cause; overt behaviors)
laugh
(nothing funny; politeness;
different sound/not;
voluntary)
pretend
dream*
(can't - in your head)
walk+
(can't - either walk/don't)
think*
(overt behavior - covert)
write+
(no paper;
no tool)
sing*
(no sound; external objects
eg. mike)

(DIAGRAM 3)

Examples of figures for analysis of pain and same

FIGURE 14 : CRITERIA SELECTED FOR 'SAME PAIN' TASK



It can be seen from Figure 14 that place and type of pain were emphasized equally by the 6 year olds (33% and 40% respectively), the 8 year olds (42% and 42%) and the 10 year olds (56% and 50% respectively). From 12 years of age, type was mentioned predominantly (69% of the subjects as opposed to 25% who emphasized place).

FIGURE 39 : CRITERIA SELECTED FOR WHERE YOU FEEL PAIN